

# How Guevara Died —The Controversy

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LA PAZ, Oct. 13—The circumstances surrounding the apparent death of Ernesto Che Guevara are still unclear, and controversy is increasing.

At the root of this situation is the secrecy, evasion and contradiction of the Bolivian government since Monday when it announced that Guevara had been shot to death near Vallegrande in remote eastern Bolivia.

This performance, coupled with the fact that the body apparently has been cremated, has triggered doubts about the official version of what happened. As a result, there probably always will be a lingering

uncertainty whether and how he died.

The official story is that Guevara was badly wounded in a battle with government troops on Sunday, that he subsequently acknowledged his identity to his captors and that he died before he could be brought to a hospital for medical attention.

On Tuesday, the Bolivian armed forces commander, Gen. Alfredo Ovando Candia, led newsmen to Vallegrande to inspect the corpse, which bore an unmistakably strong resemblance to the long-missing Guevara. The government

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presented evidence of finger-print identification and revealed the story of Guevara's dying declaration and the discovery of a diary he allegedly had kept.

The evidence was impressive enough to convince most independent observers here that Guevara had died. But, as others have since pointed out, it is by no means immune to challenge.

There were no impartial witnesses to Guevara's alleged dying declaration. And there is no real way of corroborating the authenticity of the diary.

Moreover, the possibility of laying these doubts to rest has been virtually destroyed by the government's subsequent actions. At first, it hinted the body would be brought to La Paz to allow examination.

However, these hints quickly gave way to rumors that the body had instead been disposed of secretly. When questioned about this, government officials initially reacted with silence and evasiveness.

Finally, Ovando and President Rene Barrientos Ortuño announced that considerations of good taste and the desire not to make a martyr of Guevara had convinced them that the body should be buried quietly near Vallegrande.

Then yesterday, the story took another twist with the arrival here of Guevara's brother, Roberto, an Argentine lawyer, who said he had come to view the body. Instead, he reportedly was told in a meeting with Ovando last night that this would not be possible because the remains had been cremated.

In the absence of further clarification, no one here seems able to say with certainty just what disposition was



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ROBERTO GUEVARA  
... unable to claim body

ries about why this should be. None are backed by any really hard evidence, but they nevertheless are being kept alive by the government's curious actions.

The most interesting of these holds that the dead man really was Guevara but that

ed. the circumstances of his death were not as officially reported.

The report is alleged to imply that Guevara did not die until some time after Sunday—the officially reported date of his death. It also is supposed to say that the body had bullet wounds in the heart and lungs that normally would have caused instant death and also showed evidence of bruises that might have been inflicted in a beating.

If true, the implication could be drawn that Guevara was alive and in the hands of Bolivian troops for almost a full day after the supposed time of his death. The further implication is that the fatal wounds were not inflicted until sometime on Monday.

To be sure, no one has yet been able to verify the accuracy of this story. And it is contradicted by other reports quoting eyewitnesses as saying the man definitely was dead when his body was brought into Vallegrande on Sunday.

However, the net effect is to add to the uncertainties piling up here daily. The general impression still is that the dead man was indeed Guevara. But the performance of Bolivian officialdom, whether due to sheer ineptitude or the 1005:0 at it has something to hide, has opened the door to a lot of future arguments about what actually did happen.